

A historical literature review of Australian publications in the field of Academic Language and Learning in the 1980s: Themes, schemes, and schisms: Part One

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(Received 11 June 2010; Published online 29 April 2011)

In Australia, language and academic skills advisers have been responsible for designing and delivering programs to develop tertiary students' academic writing since the early 1980s. Thirty years on, the Association for Academic Language and Learning (AALL) has begun compiling a searchable database of Australian publications in this field. I am engaged in a historical review of this literature, with the aim of orienting readers to the philosophical, pedagogical and professional issues that have occupied academic language and learning (ALL) practitioners in our region. This article, in two parts, surveys the literature of the formative decade of the 1980s which shaped a distinctive Australian approach to ALL, with a focus on mediating the epistemologies, purposes, forms and conventions of the disciplines, as revealed in their texts.

Part One traces the development of ALL from its origins, often in counselling services, charged with mediating problems attributed to the expansion of Australian tertiary education by remediating its "non-traditional" students. Part Two looks at the position of ALL practitioners in the wider context of institutional approaches to teaching and learning. Generally, academic developers were tasked with working with lecturers, while ALL advisers worked with students. Differences in the way these groups conceptualised their problems and solutions had implications for both their practice and their position in the institution. ALL practitioners commonly learned from and with individual students and their texts, and drew upon linguistics to develop a specialised discourse about tertiary literacy in which mastery of disciplinary discourses was often seen as crucial. In comparison, the academic developers' more accessible and ostensibly universal theory of "deep" or "surface" learning, and the higher status associated with working with lecturers, cemented the influence of this group and arguably contributed to further marginalisation of the role of ALL practitioners.

Key Words: academic literacies, language and learning, Australian higher education, study skills, equity, non-traditional students

1. Background to the project

This article, which looks at the scholarly literature by Australians in the field of academic language and learning (ALL) in the 1980s¹, is the first fruit of a larger study intending to span the subsequent two decades as well. This study is affiliated with a project by Judy Maxwell of the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, supported by a grant from the Association of Academic Language and Learning (AALL), to compile a searchable database of publications by ALL practitioners in the interests of facilitating our research and preserving our collective “memory” as a community of practice. Indeed, after reading some of the earliest publications by this community, beginning around 1980, I was persuaded that one of the more useful functions of a historical literature review might lie in reminding my colleagues, particularly those who have joined the field more recently, of discussions which have certainly not been superseded, and in some cases have not been bettered, since that first decade.

The literature of the eighties reveals that most of the issues that occupy us now were already central in the earliest years of our profession: the unequal opportunities for people of different backgrounds to participate in higher education; the cultural dislocation of first and second generation migrant students entering university as the first in their families to do so; the cultural differences concealed by “language difficulties” of international students; the importance of integrating or embedding skills development in the learning of the disciplines; and more. Discernible in this literature is a sense of ALL practitioners being on the periphery, believing that neither the students, nor their needs, nor the nature of ALL work, were understood by the institutions within which they worked. These concerns are the ones that we struggle with still, and some of the wisest things that have been said about them were said in the eighties; it is instructive to know what those were.

2. The perspective of the eighties

My first point in this article, therefore, is the enduring interest of discussions at that time. Equally striking, however, is that these discussions were held before the era of “massification” of Australian higher education. It has become standard, now, to attribute the problems of learning in our universities to the expansion and diversification of higher education dating from the Dawkins reforms of the late eighties, imagining a previous untroubled age in which a small, homogeneous elite arrived in the sandstone cloisters of a few institutions already fluent in the discourses that would be required of them (for a critique, see Stirling & Percy, 2005). How is it, then, that the concerns expressed by ALL practitioners in that last untroubled decade are so like ours?

Part of the answer, undoubtedly, is that they did not experience it as the calm before the storm of massification; they were teaching at a time when higher education had already grown considerably since the Second World War, and they evidently felt, as we do, that larger numbers of increasingly diverse students had needs which were not being met by their institutions. But another part of the answer may be that greater numbers and new kinds of students, while putting greater pressure on the university, are not the fundamental reason for its problems with engaging and retaining students. It was then, and still is, the failure to recognise that discipline studies confront *all* students with new and perplexing cultures of knowing and cultures of discourse, that undermines universities’ efforts to improve student success. For different kinds of students, the experience of entering the disciplines varies in ways we need to understand if we are to help them cope; but all can benefit from institutional recognition that university is

¹ At the risk of being anachronistic, I will refer to this field as ALL, although the term was not in use in the eighties; there was no common term to designate the field at that time (“learning skills counsellors” was frequent, but not standard), but it is convenient to have one for the purposes of this review. This should not be taken, however, to suggest that there was a unity of views among members of this field, nor that they undertook collective actions as a professional group, as the Association for Academic Language and Learning (AALL) does today. The nature, structure and identity of academic skills development was both various and unstable over the period under review.

crucially different from schooling and from all the other contexts from which our students come. And a current approach which is characteristic of Australian ALL, with its focus on mediating the epistemologies, purposes, forms and conventions of the disciplines, as revealed by their texts, was established in the literature of ALL in the eighties.

This approach distinguished Australian ALL from the main forms of academic support offered to students in North America at that time: freshman English subjects, taught by English department staff and required of most students; remedial courses; and individual tutoring by student peers in language labs. Frederick et al. (1981) noted that in 1975 a survey had “found 1848 [‘study skills centres’] ... in 1433 tertiary institutions [in the U.S.], most of them concentrating on instructional, programmed and remedial approaches, often offering courses for credit” (p. 6). By 1980, according to Arendale (2004), three-quarters of post-secondary institutions in the U.S. had learning assistance centres. (The Writing across the Curriculum (WAC) movement was growing in the US (Russell, 1991), and had much in common with the Australian approach evolving at the same time; but, apart from some references in *Literacy by Degrees* (1986) which suggest that Australian thinking was somewhat informed by WAC, it was seldom explicitly discussed in the literature of the eighties.)

The approach of raising students’ awareness of the cultures of discourse within which they must work also served, as the decade went on, to separate ALL practitioners, who worked with students, from the academic developers who worked with teaching staff. This was a split with implications for the decades that followed, and remains with us today. It will form the focus of Part Two of this article as it requires to be examined in some detail.

3. The context of higher education after World War Two

By way of introduction to this literature, it is useful to situate its authors with a brief look at where they sat between one wave of expansion in higher education and the next. Before the Second World War, Australia had six universities (Anderson & Eaton, 1982a, p. 7), with about 14,000 students (Karmel, 1989, p. 6). Following the war, places were increased, and government grants available, to cater for returned servicemen and promote nation-building through advanced training (Anderson & Eaton, 1982a, p. 6). In 1958, the nine universities of Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Tasmania, Queensland, New England, New South Wales, Western Australia, and the Australian National University, along with Canberra and Newcastle University Colleges, had 41,865 students, while 171 technical colleges catered for a further 204,268 students pursuing vocational, technical and professional training in 1957 (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 1960, pp. 597-600). By the 1960s the pressure of demand led government to institute a binary system in 1965, in which universities admitted the top students seeking postsecondary education, while a lower tier of Colleges of Advanced Education and Institutes of Technology was designated for students with more “practical minds” (Anderson & Eaton, 1982b, p. 99). At the end of the sixties, there were fifteen universities (with the additions of Newcastle, James Cook, Macquarie, Monash, La Trobe, and Flinders Universities) and two university colleges with 109,662 students (ABS, 1970, pp. 645-648), and 30,746 more students were enrolled in “advanced level courses” as CAEs developed their offerings to include bachelors and even some masters degrees in addition to graduate diplomas, diplomas, and certificates (ABS, 1970, p. 651). Abolition of university fees by the Whitlam Labor government in 1975 encouraged more students to attempt higher education. By 1978, nineteen universities served 160,035 students, while seventy-three CAEs served another 149,922 (ABS, 1980, pp. 283-285).

With increasing similarity but lack of parity between the sectors, this division came increasingly under pressure from below, and in 1988 a government Higher Education White Paper by then Minister for Employment, Education and Training Richard Dawkins (1988) produced a framework to expand the system by mandating amalgamation of institutions at both levels to form more or larger universities (increasing to 39 by 1995; from this time, vocational education was provided by a new lower tier of colleges of Tertiary and Further Education (TAFE)). The flavour of (a restrained) response to this from within the sector is given by David Boud’s

Presidential Address to the Conference of the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia the following year, forecasting that “Whether we agree or not with the reforms of Minister Dawkins, we cannot escape from them and we cannot return to what we will probably look back on as the age of innocence in higher education” (Boud, 1989, p. 20). More students were enabled to attend universities by the introduction of AUSTUDY allowances in 1987 and the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) in 1989 (ABS, 1990, p. 292), a system of loans which could be repaid over a period of years when (or if), after graduation, the borrower’s income reached a specified level. In 1988, Australian universities served 420, 850 students (ABS, 1990, p. 295); ten years later, they served 671,853 (ABS, 2000, p. 271).

At around the same time, international student numbers took off with a change of government policy to admit privately-funded students on a full fee paying basis (ABS, 1995, pp. 75-76). Until then, most students from overseas had been sponsored under the Colombo Plan or other government schemes, ensuring that intakes were limited to low numbers of very able students (Anderson & Eaton, 1982b, p. 102). From 13,700 international university students in 1983, the total grew to 42,600 in 1993 (ABS, 1995, p.75), and had reached 72,700 by 2000 (ABS, 2003, p. 324).

Thus, when the period covered in this paper began around 1980, Australian universities had grown, in the previous decade, from roughly 110,000 students to roughly 160,000. By the end of the decade, they had grown to roughly 421,000 students and ten years later, roughly 672,000. With hindsight, we see them poised on the brink of massification; but from their point of view (e.g. Beasley, 1983, p. 1; Bowlay & Dorland, 1984, pp. 1-2; McEvedy, 1984, p.1; Unsworth, 1983, p. 1; Zuber-Skerritt, 1982, p. 28), this was well under way, and it is worth noting that government funding was by then in decline. Williams (1979) noted in 1979 that “real recurrent grants per student per Faculty reached a peak in 1968 ... [and] since 1975 there has been a reduction of about 10%” (p. 11). (This decline in Commonwealth support continued until, by 2008, public universities obtained less than half their revenue from the government (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008, p. 9). The aggressive promotion of Australian higher education to markets overseas, which led to a trebling of international student numbers in the decade up to 2006 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008, p. 3) must be understood in the light of this withdrawal of public funding, for which universities tried to compensate with income from fees. From the mid-seventies, too, demand from school-leavers began to decline and only a growth of demand from mature-aged students kept numbers up (Anderson & Eaton, 1982b, p. 93). As funding fell, staff-student ratios burgeoned, from (approximately) 1:12 in the 1970s and early eighties to 1:15 in 1995 and 1:20 in 2005 (Karmel, 2003; cf. Commonwealth of Australia, 2008, p. 12).

Thus, as Stirling and Percy (2005) have pointed out, “rather than coalescing around the reforms of the 1980s, the expansion and diversification of higher education in Australia were, in fact, components in a gradual process of uneven development over the last half of the 20th century” (p. 180). But “[t]he 1980s marked a period of increasing problematisation of the Australian higher education sector in general”; anxiety then came to centre on the “non-traditional” students “because participation and retention rates had become an area of intensifying concern” (Stirling & Percy, 2005, p. 181).

4. Diversity in the student body

This brings us to the question of diversity in student cohorts in our period. While numbers increased, according to Anderson and Eaton (1982a) the social makeup of university students remained largely unchanged and in the sixties, “universities appeared to be as under-representative of all classes of society as they had been in the past” (p. 7; Curry & Baldock, 1989). The establishment of the binary system at that point effectively cushioned universities from the lower-middle and working classes, who were more likely to attend CAEs (Anderson & Eaton, 1982b, p. 98). Nonetheless, some pressure for more equitable access began to be felt in the sixties, and in 1974-5 the new Labor government abolished fees and introduced a means-tested living allowance, the Tertiary Education Assistance Scheme. However, as Anderson and

Eaton (1982b, p. 101) point out, this helped only students who finished school and satisfied university entrance standards, while most students of low socio-economic status had fallen away before that point (a problem which continues to frustrate universities' recruitment efforts to the present day). The Minister for Education in 1979, John Carrick (1979, p. 45), estimated that 35% of students reached matriculation at that time, a growing but still quite select pool of potential postsecondary students. Aboriginal participation in education was very low, with only 4.9% of Aboriginal children entering senior secondary level (Anderson & Eaton, 1982b, p. 101; see also Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission, 1985; Wolanowski, 1987).

Thus, most students were still elite, young, and Anglo at the beginning of the eighties – but not all. A majority of the population, including migrants, now saw education as the way forward for their children (Anderson & Eaton, 1982a, p. 17) although, until the early eighties, migrant students' aspirations were frustrated by inadequate proficiency in English (Anderson & Eaton, 1982b, p. 101). There were also international students, albeit not many. In addition, a sizeable proportion of students were now mature aged. Beginning with La Trobe in 1972, universities were devising schemes to admit older students who had not matriculated but demonstrated strong motivation and intellectual promise (Anderson & Eaton, 1982, p. 109). In 1978, about 40% of university students were over 22 years old (Anderson & Eaton, 1982b, p. 109), and this proportion held; ten years later, of the 420,850 students at university, about 12% were aged 25-29, and about 27% aged 30 years and over (ABS, 1990, p. 295). It should be noted, however, that this group did not, as expected, struggle with university study, on the whole: Anderson and Eaton (1982b), surveying the literature up to 1981, concluded that “mature age students, irrespective of the way they are admitted, tend to gain high marks, have excellent pass rates and about the same attrition rates as young students entering direct from school” (p. 109). ALL advisers who instituted bridging courses for mature-aged students in the eighties likewise found that they were not disadvantaged by their time away from formal education (see Section 8.2).

5. Arrangements for academic support in higher education

And how were ALL services organised at this time? At first a part of the function of counselling services, ALL advice had evolved, by the early eighties, to occupy a variety of niches in Australian universities. Counselling services began to be established in the 1950s in response to intractable problems of failure and attrition (Quintrell & Robertson, 1995). A review on “academic wastage and failure” (Sanders, 1958, cited in Anderson & Eaton, 1982) advised that such services “are essential to deal with individual educational weakness and assist in the rehabilitation of the potentially able who have become [sic] social, emotional and academic breakdowns” (p. 27). The problem of failure was not solely attributed to students, for, as Anderson and Eaton (1982) note, “many recommendations were made for the improvement of university teaching during this period”; however, “there were few developments in this area; instead, resources were used for the establishment of student services” (p. 28; for recent reflections on the lasting legacy of ALL's origins in student services, see Stevenson & Kokkinn, 2007).

The first counselling service was set up in 1953 at the University of Melbourne. They proliferated in the 1960s, and by 1982 every university and nearly every college had one. In the early years, these performed a wide range of functions; the service founded at Flinders University in 1966 was involved, through the seventies, in “personal counselling, course advice, study skills, language support for international students, arrang[ing] orientation and ... various group programs” (Quintrell & Robertson, 1955, pp. 215-216). Over this period they gave more attention to personal counselling of individuals, and to “personal development” groups, than to study skills, and according to Quintrell and Robertson (1995), counsellors came to see themselves as “agents of change”: there was “a radical shift of function, moving from a view of services as established to assist students to adjust to the institution, to services striving to change universities to better adapt to student need” (p. 209). Indeed, this comes strongly through Sillitoe and Gorman's (1989) account of the Student Services' “participation and equity initiatives” at the Footscray Institute of Technology, which speaks of tertiary education as the “imposition of an alien culture” on students from a “disadvantaged background” (p. 164).

The energies of counsellors were re-directed in the early eighties, however, following a government report on student services (Roe, Foster, Moses, Sanker, & Storey, 1982), which found that “students’ concerns were strongly focussed on issues to do with assistance with study and explicitly educational concerns ... [and] questioned whether counsellors, most of whom were psychologists, were appropriately trained to work on essentially academic problems” (Quintrell & Robertson, 1995, p. 210; but cf. D. Taylor’s (1985) case for the effectiveness of a holistic approach addressing students’ emotional and academic difficulties together). The functions of counselling services were thereafter more clearly and narrowly defined, with other services set up to deal with housing, finances, and so on, and counselling adopted a more collaborative, rather than adversarial, role. (See, for example, Williams and Shaw’s (1982) note on a program responding to an architecture department’s request to have its intensely competitive students trained in teamwork skills by the institution’s counsellors; also, Macdonald, Elphinstone, and Wyatt’s (1989) account of a “team-building programme” for Engineering students at RMIT.)

When Frederick et al. reported to the University of Melbourne on students’ needs in the area of learning skills in 1981, they identified six models of provision in Australia and elsewhere. These included a “Student Counselling Service”; a “Specialist Learning Skills Counsellor located in the Counselling service” as at La Trobe, Sydney, Queensland, and Melbourne; a “Learning Skills Specialist attached to a Higher Education Research and Teaching Unit” as at Murdoch and Monash; a “Learning Skills Unit operating autonomously”, as at the ANU; a “Special Services Unit concerned with a particular aspect of language and learning skills” such as English as a Second Language; and a “Specialist Tutor/Lecturer within a faculty or department, whose brief is limited to that School”, as at La Trobe (Frederick, Hancock, James, Bowden, & Macmillan, 1981, pp. 14-15). Unusually, “Murdoch University incorporates compulsory learning skills units in its first year core courses, with optional units available from then on” (Frederick et al., 1981, p. 13). Here, the need was clearly seen as developmental rather than remedial: Lorraine Marshall, who was responsible for these units, tells us they were based on the assumption that “the majority of incoming students require help in developing university work skills”, and it was further assumed that skills should be developed in the context of “content” subjects which were taught by “Learning Skills tutors who are also content tutors” (1982, p. 9). “It is these trunk courses”, writes Marshall (1982), “which are closely bound up with the concept of an introductory first year, that have made it possible for all Murdoch students to have access to help with learning how to learn in integration with their course content” (p. 10).

Similarly, Frederick et al. (1981) stress that “*Learning skills counselling is as concerned with helping students develop their potential as with remedial programmes for those in difficulties*” (p. 77; their emphasis). Their report further emphasises in several places (e.g., p. 78, p. 86) that because each student’s circumstances are unique, individual consultations were the preferred mode of teaching in most learning skills services in Australia and overseas, having proved most effective (sometimes dramatically so, lifting students from pass to Honours level, e.g., p. 76). A few institutions used some peer mentoring (Sillitoe & Webb, 1989, 1990), but it was, and remained, uncommon.

In 1985, according to a survey by Neil Quintrell of Flinders University’s Health and Counselling Services (1985, pp. 160-161), counselling services were still the most common location: seven of the nine responding universities had a counselling service responsible for some academic skills development, usually alongside one or another of the other kinds of service described by Frederick et al. (1981). We can add to these the distinctive model at the Lincoln Institute of Health Sciences in Melbourne, where the Study Skills Assistance Scheme was staffed by discipline lecturers who each devoted three hours a week to advising students, providing “courses on study skills”, and helping staff “with the structuring of curriculum in such a way as to facilitate students’ development of study skills” (Hayden & Remeny, 1987, p. 210).

All of Quintrell’s respondents were working with individuals and groups; only at Griffith did they report any “integration of skills programmes into courses” (Quintrell, 1985, p. 161). This

does not mean that no place else had tried; the report by Frederick et al. (1981) focuses particularly on the Learning Skills Project undertaken by the University of Melbourne over two years, in which the initial intention had been “to launch and promote a scheme which would eventually result in many departments running their own programmes, perhaps even as an integral part of some course” (p. 20). For a time, the Learning Skills Counsellor collaborated with interested lecturers to run programs for groups of students; but although these proved popular with students, the staff could not sustain the effort on top of their normal teaching loads, without support or recognition from their departments. The organisers regretfully concluded that

Learning skills courses for students that are run within a course by teaching staff from the department or faculty are probably among the most desirable and effective ways of helping students, but are subject to a number of major problems and seem unlikely to become widespread in this University, at least in the short term. (Frederick et al., p. 69)

6. Academic development units

While learning skills programs for students were developing in counselling services and other locations, there was a parallel, if lesser, growth of academic development units dating from the nineteen-sixties. The Centre for the Study of Higher Education was founded at Melbourne in 1968. By 1975, according to Anderson and Eaton (1982a, p. 7), most universities and CAEs had units tasked with improving teaching and learning in their institutions. Soon, staff engaged in this work moved to establish a professional identity and public voice: the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) was founded in 1971 and HERDSA, the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia, in 1972 (Anderson and Eaton, 1982b, p. 94). In some of these units, the function of providing learning skills support to students was also carried out, though not necessarily by the same people who worked with teaching staff.

7. The focus of Part One

The preceding part of my study has been devoted to setting the scene for the literature review to follow. Institutions of higher education were divided into two tiers by this time, although, as we shall see, the people responsible for academic skills development communicated across this divide – much more, in fact, than university and TAFE practitioners (in the Tertiary And Further Education colleges that shouldered the vocational function of CAEs after the Dawkins amalgamations) do today. It is notable, too, that while academic development was emerging as the higher-status partner in the effort to improve students’ learning, there was not at this time a division into separate realms of academic development and ALL advising to the extent which we experience today. The “study skills” conferences, held roughly annually throughout the eighties, were attended by staff of university and CAE counselling and study skills units together with staff of academic development units. At the same time, some ALL practitioners attended the annual conferences of HERDSA. It was during this decade, however, that a split emerged between particular groups of academic developers and ALL practitioners, both in their approach to the work and in terms of the professional communities they looked to as their reference groups.

The further I have read in the literature, indeed, the more I have found myself diverted from my original intention simply to survey the “themes and schemes” – the concerns and practices – of the period, and drawn to focus on one compelling problem: the breakdown of communication between many academic developers and ALL advisers. Part Two of this article, therefore, will focus on that problem, and seek to tease out its implications for our own times. The question of whose role it is to promote skills development, where, and how, is a legacy of this period.

In order to understand what was distinctive about the approach of many ALL practitioners, and how it evolved from the generic, remedial mission assigned to them, we must look first at the range of ways in which ALL programs sought to address the needs of particular kinds of students in the interests of equity. The remainder of Part One will outline the literature dealing

with these programs, and some of the issues they confronted. Most of the sources for this period are conference papers which, until now, have been rather difficult to locate; but fortunately, most of the proceedings of the Study Skills conferences have been scanned and posted on the website of AALL at <http://www.aall.org.au/conferences>, so interested readers can consult them there. Less often, ALL practitioners had papers in the proceedings of the annual HERDSA conferences – *Research and Development in Higher Education* -- and in addition to these unrefereed publications (for refereeing was much less common then than now), there were some articles in *Higher Education Research and Development* and a very few other journals, and a number of book chapters.

8. Programs to promote access and equity

As learning skills services had been established to meet a need that institutions commonly thought of as remedial, it was natural that, in the eighties, they would take up the challenge of devising programs to encourage rural students to think of attending university (Brown-Parker & Brown-Parker, 1985; Walker, 1990a); programs to boost the skills of low-achieving school leavers (Anderson, 1990; Callaghan & Slockwitch, 1990; Postle, Mangubhae, & Williams, 1990); programs to remedy specific deficiencies, mainly in numeracy (Chapman & Willis, 1990; Guillemin, 1990; Landbeck, 1990); programs to ease access to particular courses for particular cohorts of students lacking relevant language or background, such as a Learning Support Scheme for NESB students in Health Sciences (Hunter & Hayden, 1989), an orientation for Mature-Age entrants into Community Work (Johnston, 1989), or a peer mentoring program (Bochner & Neill, 1989) or support group (O'Connor, 1989) for Nursing students; and programs to support the transition to tertiary education of various kinds of non-traditional students (Barker, 1990; Beasley, 1989a, 1989b; Hore & Barwood, 1989; Hubbard & Kelly, 1990; Ryan, 1990).

Such programs are described in Brock (1987, 1989), Sillitoe and Gorman (1989), Stephenson and Munn (1990), and Barker (1990), while obstacles to access for Aboriginal and working-class people and people with disabilities are the subject of Beasley's (1983) paper on "Opening the doors to higher education", in which he asserts that such people "are, in effect, banned from admission to university" (p. 1). However, he proposes a bridging course to address this, and in subsequent publications (Beasley, 1984, 1985, 1986) he discusses the evolution of this course and its value to the students who passed through it. (Cranich (1989), while not an ALL practitioner, contributes to understanding of the contexts of tertiary education for Indigenous students at this time by bringing together perspectives on Maori students in New Zealand and Aboriginal students in Australia.)

8.1. Programs for Aboriginal students

Hore and Barwood (1989) and Wolanowski (1987) tell of other programs to support Aboriginal students. The University of Queensland offered a range of support for Aboriginal students, including an Aboriginal Studies Coordinator, two study skills counsellors, an Aboriginal postgraduate student acting as a tutor, subject tutoring in academic departments, and an Aboriginal and Islander Students Association. Further affirmation was embodied in two "interdisciplinary credit courses based on Aboriginal perspectives and not on anthropological perspectives of Aboriginal life: Aboriginal Perspectives and Aboriginal Approaches to Knowledge" (Wolanowski, 1987, p. 194).

Wolanowski (1987) thinks it important to consider whether Aboriginal students are different in any important ways, as was commonly claimed:

The differences between Aboriginal and western approaches to knowledge and learning are often presented as contrasting pairs of descriptors: oral – written; practical – theoretical; concrete – abstract; cooperative – competitive; group/community-centred – individual-centred. The differences in the communication modes between the two cultures can be contrasted as: not being intrusive – direct questioning; waiting for a consensus to develop –

stepping in with own preferences; limiting argument – encouraging debate; need to establish congenial relationship – concentrating on a given task [citing Liberman, 1982]. (p. 199)

However, Wolanowski (1987) found that, “Not many characteristics listed above were evident in the approaches taken by the Aboriginal students participating in the program” (p. 199). While some failed to look beyond “concrete information” to “underlying principles”, the same was true of non-Aboriginal students (Wolanowski, 1987, p. 199). “It seems,” she concludes, “that it is not a distinct learning style that distinguishes Aboriginal from non-Aboriginal students but rather their preference for a different socio-cultural setting of learning” (Wolanowski, 1987, p. 199). The students thought that support from other Aboriginal students was the most useful kind of assistance, and Wolanowski (1987) recommended that the university try to recruit more Aboriginal students and staff, as well as educating the staff it already had, for “The existence of Aboriginal English is sometimes not recognised by non-Aborigines and this can be a source of problems, frustration and misunderstanding” (p. 199). At the same time, she saw the common identity that bonded Aboriginal students together, “that is knowledge and pride of Aboriginal culture, shared feeling of being ‘different’ and feeling of belonging to a dispossessed and oppressed minority group”, as a source of both strength and weakness.

If education equals assimilation then students fear that they are risking educating themselves out of their Aboriginal community. For example, a student resented having to write essays in standard English, for this student using a foreign language meant losing Aboriginal identity. (Wolanowski, 1987, p. 197; cf. Beasley’s (1989, p. 120) urging that “acculturation ... is not assimilation”.)

8.2. Programs for mature-aged students

Mature aged students, often recruited through special admissions schemes (e.g., Hore & Barwood, 1989), were another group for whom bridging and orientation courses were run (Ballard, 1983; Ballard, Clanchy, & Taffe, 1984; Beasley, 1984; Curry & Baldock, 1989; Quintrell, 1984). As noted above, these students usually coped well, and often better than their younger peers; however, they often began their courses with trepidation, and the courses were valuable for boosting their confidence and helping them to establish social networks. Interestingly, in a study of “Gender differences in orientation towards study”, Triggs (1990) found that women were less confident and more stressed than men, and worked harder to do well (p. 97).

8.3. Programs for students with disabilities

There is very little in the literature of the eighties on students with disabilities, perhaps because universities were not legally required to accommodate such students until the Disability Discrimination Act of 1992. In fact, writing in 1991, Meekosha, Jakubowicz, and Rice reveal a quite inadequate response at both policy and institutional levels to the needs of students with disabilities. Nonetheless, in the ALL literature of the eighties, Noble (1985) usefully describes the “symptoms” of dyslexia, its effects on learning, and its implications for teaching and assessment. Walker (1990b), meanwhile, tells of efforts to improve access to tertiary study for Tasmanians with severe physical disabilities.

8.4. Programs for distance learners

“Non-traditional” students, especially older, rural, and working students, were among the beneficiaries of a trend just getting underway at this time: the development of distance learning (Ellis, 1987; Holt & Northcott, 1987; Lewis, 1990; Marshall, 1984; Mott, 1990; Nation, 1987; Shaw, 1990; West, 1990). This mode of delivery represented a further effort to extend higher education to more diverse (and therefore less-prepared) students (Bowlay & Dorland, 1984, p. 1). Much of the discussion in the literature is concerned with the promise and the limitations of the technology available. For example, Gilks (1984) reflects on the problem that teaching via television, audio and video tapes allows for a movement of ideas (about maths, in this

discussion) in only one direction; student reactions cannot be monitored in this mode of teaching. Bowlay and Dorland (1984), too, are concerned with the problems for off-campus students of communicating their needs for support, and describe a number of options offered by The University of New England (UNE) both on the campus (a student services officer or a counsellor) and outside, including alumni either trained and paid, or voluntary and untrained. Alternatively, UNE had made arrangements with other counselling services, so external students might be able to consult a counsellor at their local institution. In addition to people ready to help, there were various print and audio resources available including study skills tapes made by counsellors; correspondence courses, for a fee, on “Essay writing for tertiary students” and “English expression and grammar”; and a “remedial and refresher course in basic mathematics” or a workbook (Bowlay & Dorland, 1984, p. 7).

From our standpoint in 2010, it is interesting to learn of the many ingenious ways devised for connecting with students who would today be using email and/or social networking online. Generally, indeed, distance learning seems to have worked satisfactorily. Ellis (1987), who anticipated a range of difficulties with transmitting lessons, was bemused to hear from a remote student that, “The only problem that I might have is the weather. Fortunately we have had little rain so I can use the generator” (p. 515).

While discussions of the technology are mostly, now, of purely historical interest, we may linger over a critique of the assumptions and practices in this mode of teaching by Frances Rowland of the External Studies Unit at Murdoch. In a paper titled “Industrialised, individualised or independent?” she argues that neither using technology to make distance education feasible and efficient (industrialised), nor giving students some (individualised) flexibility in essay topic choice and time taken to complete assignments, amounts to teaching that allows students to be independent, by which she means teaching that is “student-centred and learning-centred, with self-directed students who take responsibility for their own learning” (Rowland, 1984, p. 3). She is dubious about supporting this “industrial approach” by providing “a general learning skills package” which would “separate the learning process from course content, and approach learning skills problems as though they were diseases against which students could be vaccinated” (1984, p. 7).

Rowland’s misgivings about the role of ALL advisers in supporting a misguided approach to education may resonate with many of us today. “[M]any study skills texts,” in her view, “seem concerned chiefly with helping students have a nicer time while meeting other people’s objectives” (Rowland, 1984, p. 24), whereas Rowland thinks that students should set their own problems, and initiate their own learning experiences. With assignment oriented paths through courses encouraging surface learning, “many course guides show little evidence of real encouragement for students to think about their own objectives and even less evidence of time allowed for students [to] evolve their own objectives as an integral part of a course” (Rowland, 1984, p. 9). Radically, Rowland (1984) would like to see lecturers set aside their concern with retaining authority, to “trust students to learn intelligently” (p. 22), and to allow “student-initiated projects or contracts within a course or instead of a course” (p. 16).

Those of us who are also concerned with the preparation and design of course materials for external students could give higher priority to helping teachers move towards becoming resource people for students ... We could also ask ourselves questions about ... whether [new technology] will actually improve teaching and help students learn independently (the two are not automatically identical) or whether the technology will be used to deliver ‘more of the same’, with student choice still limited. (Rowland, 1984, p. 22)

Holt and Northcott (1987) likewise pointed to the problem that, “The more highly structured and self-contained the [subject] learning packages are, in order to free students from place and time constraints, the less adaptable and responsive these pre-produced packages can be to individual learning styles, needs and interests” (p. 500). As “packaging” proliferates, and the terminology of “delivery” often replaces “teaching”, we are wise to continue to question the identification of teacherless study with learner independence.

8.5. Programs for students with language backgrounds other than English

The last group of students identified in the literature as needing specific kinds of support were students from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB), either international students or migrants. A survey carried out in 1988 (Gollin, 1991) found a wide range of support for NESB students in Australian universities, including bridging courses, individual assistance, and concurrent support: that is, not-for-credit courses in generic skills, or adjunct courses such as English for Physics or Engineering. Deravin's (1985) course in English for Academic Purposes is an example of the former; examples of the latter include Hewitt, Knowles, and Lange's (1990) courses in English for Specific Purposes for students of Medicine and Agriculture. Bridging programs, too, could be generic or discipline-specific, like the migrant nurse bridging program described by Sorell and Otmarich (1990).

Although there were benefits in all these approaches, according to Gollin (1991, p. 184), there were also problems. ELICOS or bridging courses were misleading in that they were less challenging than university subjects, and were taught by staff who lacked sufficient knowledge of the subject areas. Adjunct courses were better, but added to students' workload – already a source of stress – and there was still the problem of ESL lecturers lacking subject expertise. Students did not tend to stick with voluntary, short courses, and individual teaching was expensive and repetitive, while self-access learning packages were largely “busy work”. To address these problems, the University of Technology, Sydney instituted credit courses in communication designed for second language learners to supplement the non-credit courses and individual support already on offer (Gollin, 1991, p. 185). These did not teach remedial English but, taking content from a range of fields, they covered academic and professional genres. From a different perspective – that of a counsellor seeking to promote confidence in the face of challenging cultural adjustments – Chan (1982, 1990) ran sessions to encourage international students to overcome their reticence about speaking up in tutorials and talking to their lecturers.

While discipline lecturers and international students alike attributed their difficulties to inadequate proficiency in English, ALL practitioners saw cultural differences as equally or sometimes more important (Ballard, 1982, 1984, 1987; Buckingham, 1990; Gassin, 1982). Several writers rehearse the now-familiar stereotypes of international students as having an unquestioning belief in the authority of sources and of teachers (Buckingham, 1990), and a “conserving” (Ballard, 1984, p. 49) or “reproducing” (Samuelowicz, 1987, p. 123) approach to learning. They were thought to be “accustomed to be passive recipients of knowledge” and to rely on rote memorisation rather than seeking to understand, let alone question, what they heard or read (Samuelowicz, 1987, p. 125). “The first step,” writes Samuelowicz (1987), “is to help overseas students change from passive reception of authoritarian thinking to self-developing, self-motivated, critical learning where critical and analytical thinking is more important than reproducing ideas” (p. 129). Buckingham (1990), similarly, writes of a need to “move these students from what is simply correct to what is questioning and critical” (p. 213). Not until 1990 was the assumption that memorising somehow prevented understanding challenged in print by Biggs, who suggested that it might be a “form of academic colonialism” (Biggs, 1990, p. 31). However, a critical mass of evidence of Chinese students' academic success had been needed to compel this re-think, and for most of the eighties, ALL practitioners did not publically express misgivings about the assumption that memorisation and understanding were natural enemies (e.g., Gibbs, Morgan, & Taylor, 1982; Landbeck, 1987).

In some writers' eyes, there seems to have been no doubt that the anglo-Western academic tradition was far superior. Bundesen and Cole (1990), who ran English language bridging courses and concurrent courses for students both on- and off-shore, wrote that “They need to think and write logically, following a coherent argument. They need to be given permission to think, and to be shown that it is not cheating to think for themselves” (p. 3). More often, however, people involved in teaching international students took a more culturally-relativist view, like Rae (1990) who simply writes of the need for international students to adjust to “the requirement to study with a different purpose, and to present work according to quite different parameters” (p. 236). They felt that Australian academics, for their part, ought to recognise that there are other ways of thinking, of learning, and of presenting ideas, than the ones they had

been trained in and simply took for granted (Mitchell, 1989). Ballard (1987, p. 116) urged that teachers must “become much more conscious of their own teaching objectives and strategies” and make these more explicit. Buckingham (1990) observed that “Most of our teachers never articulate what it is they want from students. Rather they have an unwavering faith in the universality of their attitudes and intellectual pursuits, seeing any diversion from them purely in terms of degrees of excellence” (p. 213).

It was common for ALL advisers to see their role as that of an interpreter between cultures (Clerehan, 1990). Ballard (1982) wrote,

Australian universities are ... bound within the Western cultural traditions of approaches to knowledge and learning. Academic staff can be as culturally blinkered as any overseas undergraduate, and ... the skill I need here is two-fold: to make explicit for the student the cultural values that are deeply implicit in each academic system, and to interpret for both the students and the academic staff member across this cultural divide. (p. 119)

For Bock (1982), indeed, the experience of interpreting raised fundamental, and uncomfortable, questions about the academic culture of which she was a part:

[T]he more students I see of different cultural origins and the more I listen to what they try to explain to me, the more I find my role shifting: only rarely do I teach essay structure or grammar, mostly I find myself attempting to interpret to the student the environment in which the essay is to be written ... I am finding in short that language and culture cannot be separated in teaching ... Looking at the migrant students’ “language problems”, therefore, I find myself wondering if our universities really are the centres of universal enquiry that we are accustomed to consider them, except perhaps as defined within the limits of our own culture. Could it be that university problems, questions and answers are highly culture-specific ... Does “objectivity” exist, or are we merely dealing in subject-acceptable and subject-unacceptable subjectivity? (p. 155)

These kinds of insights stemmed not from a failure to focus on language, but from the perspective that a focus on language afforded. ALL practitioners were well versed in applied linguistics, and readily adopted the genre framework that informed, for example, Swales’ (1984) work on structures of academic writing. Some had begun to draw upon the Australian theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) elaborated by M.A.K. Halliday and his colleagues over the previous decade, which likewise afforded insights into the nature of genres; SFL was to gain more currency with ALL practitioners in the 1990s, but we see its early influence in the eighties as well. To Jones, Gollin, Drury, and Economou (1989), at the University of Sydney, SFL was particularly helpful as it enabled a systematic analysis of language features and choices at the level of whole texts, in the light of the contexts within and for which they were produced. It took into account the institutional and social situations that shaped both the characteristic structures and the “interpersonal” work done by texts of different registers. SFL enabled skills advisers to “communicate to the student *why* certain choices in their writing will be inappropriate or *why* a text has a certain structure and *how* the features of cohesion ... integrate to contribute to textual unity” (Jones, Gollin, Drury, & Economou, 1989, p. 260).

At the same time, ALL practitioners drew upon the insights of contrastive rhetoric such as Clyne’s (1982) characterisation of the different structures and rhythms of discourse in texts of different cultural/linguistic groupings. While the broad-brush generalisations of contrastive rhetoric were certainly open to challenge (see, e.g., Taylor & Chen, 1991), Clyne’s (1982) work calling attention to alternative ways of realising “clarity, logic, or cohesion” (p. 102) in written texts and Hinds’ (1987) work on different cultural assumptions about writers’ and readers’ responsibility for the meanings of texts have been invaluable in informing ALL understandings of – and respect for – our students’ ways of writing. ALL practitioners were more open than most in their institutions to the merits of other cultures’ ways of cultivating knowledge, and we

have Rae (1990) to thank for sharing a communication from a Pakistani friend who, with a PhD from Cambridge, had nonetheless opted out of academic life to run a restaurant instead:

People here are asked to present the fruits of their academic endeavours in a manner which rigorously excludes anything but so-called “pertinent facts”. Thus there will be a tightly-drawn proposition, a series of stark points or arguments, and a conclusion resembling an accountant’s total which the “scholar” expects the reader to accept on the basis of its manifest logical force. To me this is *barbaric*. In my culture the primary purpose of intellectual discourse is to establish an ambience in which the point of view of the scholar will be naturally understood and appreciated (quoted in Rae, 1990, p. 236).

Thus, when ALL advisers wrote that international students “have to learn to think like us” (Gassin, 1982, p. 13), they do not seem to have been advocating assimilation so much as learning another academic culture which would allow students to do a kind of code-switching. The quotation in the previous sentence continues, “(i.e. they have to learn what kind of information and what style of organisation is important to us) before they can begin to cope with the material in any given discipline” (Gassin, 1982, p. 13). While Ballard (1982) expected that “there may have to be an epistemological shift, a change in the student’s whole approach to learning and knowledge”, she was not advocating that a student should “abandon his own culture and adopt Australian or Western culture uncritically”; instead, “he must become consciously aware of the differences between the two cultures which are significant for his current purposes – getting an Australian degree – and then adapt at least temporarily to the most appropriate style of learning” (Ballard, 1982, pp. 124-5). She discusses the example of a failing Japanese student who worked with her at the level of cultural adjustment, and earned credits without improving his English: “his lecturers are rewarding his capacity to think in accordance with western patterns and to organise and present his ideas in a style appropriate to Western cultural traditions” (Ballard, 1982, p.127). In a later article, Ballard (1987) added,

... Other examples abound which display a similar pattern: academic success in the home culture, failure in the new context of a western university, intervention by an adviser who identified the problem as one of cultural dislocation rather than linguistic incompetence, and thereafter a rapid – sometimes spectacular – regaining of competence. (p. 51)

While Ballard’s (1982) example is an overseas student, her point applies more generally, as she was careful to spell out. A distinctive achievement of Australian ALL in the eighties – and perhaps its most valuable legacy to us – was its recognition that every student in higher education has to make a poorly-understood transition between cultures, and faces some kind(s) of “cultural dislocation”. Ballard (1982) emphasises that her approach, and that of her colleagues, to working with international students is

only a further development of the way we work with our Australian students. With these students too we move as quickly as possible from the initial “My lecturer sent me because of my poor expression” or “This essay is illiterate” to a consideration of the thinking underlying the piece of writing – the terms of the topic, the appropriate questions to be raised, the evidence and methods of analysis particular to the discipline of the course, the most effective organisation and presentation of the whole argument. We are always, in our work, consciously moving the student towards a clearer recognition of the different styles of thinking appropriate to the sub-cultures of the different disciplines he² is studying. With overseas students I am only adding a further cultural dimension – the habits of thought and exposition peculiar to Western academic culture. (p. 127)

² Editor’s note: Although it is JALL policy to use gender inclusive language, the use of masculine pronouns to refer to both males and females was still common practice in the 1980s.

This shift in emphasis from language to culture, and from a narrow notion of ethnic culture to a broader understanding encompassing academic and discipline cultures, would also inform ALL advisers' awareness of the particular difficulties experienced by students who were migrants rather than international visitors. Tse (1989) cautions that the needs of Australian migrant students are likely to be overlooked "because of the relatively high profile of the full fee paying group, [whose] concerns can become dominant in a system with limited resources" (p. 66). Also contributing to migrant students' lower visibility was their greater fluency in spoken English; however, unlike international students, they were often unfamiliar with a university environment. "The point is that these two groups of NESB students[,] while sharing some common difficulties[,] actually have separate concerns that need to be clearly identified and neither group will benefit from support that is aimed in between them if they are identified as a single category" (Tse, 1989, p. 66).

Jessup (1990) likewise stressed that "we must guard against international students being seen as representative of all NESB students in Australian institutions of higher education" (p. 233). Bourne (1989) and Mitchell (1989) point to the pressures on recently arrived NESB students, while Bock (1982) describes these, as well as students who have lived longer in Australia, as "disguised foreigners" (p. 141). According to Bock, not only their English grammar and vocabulary may be affected by "interference" from their home language, but their ideas about the purpose and structure of essays may also be based on schooling elsewhere. Australian lecturers are likely, in Bock's experience, to think that such students have no idea how to do academic work, when in fact they have different ideas. If essays are "cultural battlegrounds" for migrant students (as Bock's (1982) title puts it), the experience of university may also estrange them from families with no prior experience of higher education, who are proud of their children but suspicious of the challenges to their personal and community values (cf. Sillitoe & Gorman, 1989).

For these writers, migrant students' cultural differences blend with class differences as barriers to higher education, and the problems are compounded by their low visibility, for their apparent fluency in English is misleading. They may be able to speak and comprehend the language more proficiently than international students, but may have less experience with academic registers and share with Australian students a limited acquaintance with the metalanguage of grammar that international students are able to draw upon. Furthermore, visibility in this sense is even less for second-generation students, for whom language may nonetheless still be a problem. At least, if attention is directed at the challenges, for all students, of entering academic and discipline cultures, "disguised foreigners" are also beneficiaries of this approach. Indeed, Neumann (1985) recommends that in future research, "The major concerns should be with the extent to which language problems are common to all groups of students and the degree to which difficulties in university study are related to conceptual capabilities independent of language background" (p. 193).

It was axiomatic to many ALL practitioners that such learning must occur in its discipline context, but this was not (and still is not) a view shared by others in their institutions. Clerehan (1990) wrote that, "Academic staff will often refer students believing that language advisers can sort out problems without specific reference to content", but "a large part of our role has been to liaise with subject-specialist staff, endeavouring to unravel the conceptual and other requirements for a particular subject or assignment" (p. 223). ALL advisers were often working against the assumptions on which their employment had been based for, as Ballard (1984) found, "instruction in grammar or ideal structures for essays ... seems to be of marginal value ... if [students] are approaching their materials in a manner inappropriate to the academic culture of which they are a part" (p. 52). Therefore, "assistance in the fundamental reorientation of intellectual behaviour cannot be achieved in a short preliminary course divorced from academic content; just as with language skills, we have found it can best be achieved through concurrent assistance, in close relation to the actual demands of the student's course" (Ballard, 1987, p. 117; cf. Buckingham, 1990). While the literature of this time was not concerned with a question that has occupied the field more recently – of whether it is possible to speak of a unitary or stable culture of a discipline – it may be that this attention to "actual demands" kept

the advice of some ALL practitioners from being unhelpfully generic. This seems to have varied, as we shall see in Part Two, with ALL practitioners' access to students' work in the disciplines.

9. Conclusion

Already in the 1980s, therefore, Australian ALL had developed what Emerson and Clerehan (2009) have identified as "The consistent emphasis ... for practitioners in Australia ... on integrating the understanding and teaching of writing within the context of the particular discipline" (p. 169). This was not what they had been employed to do, as their brief was, rather, to remediate the deficiencies of individuals or particular categories of students. It would, therefore, require a good deal of work to reframe institutional understandings to allow ALL practitioners to work in the ways they believed to be most effective. But how much influence could ALL practitioners hope to have on their institutional cultures and policies? They were, for the most part, located at the margins of academic activity. Their insights came from one-to-one teaching and so, by definition, rested on "anecdotal" evidence. Their accounts of this work employed a specialist discourse drawing on linguistics, which was not widely understood outside their own professional community. And they were not the only players in the effort to improve the learning of their students. Academic developers were also engaged in this work, many of whom offered a more accessible theory, and occupied a more commanding platform in the edifice of academic status. Part Two of this article takes up that story.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to La Trobe University for granting me a semester's leave to carry out this study; to Judy Maxwell and Scott McDonald of RMIT for offering affiliation with the larger AALL database project; and to the following people for advice, encouragement, and help with locating sources: Brigid Ballard, Annie Bartlett, Rosemary Clerehan, Bev Kokkin, Lorraine Marshall, Alisa Percy, Katherine Samuelowicz, and Gordon Taylor.

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